United Nations E/CN.6/2019/NGO/82

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
26 November 2018

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Sixty-third session
11–22 March 2019
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Statement submitted by ActionAid, Associated Country Women of the World, Christian Aid, Global Fund for Widows, Guild of Service, HelpAge International, International Federation of Business and Professional Women, Mother's Union, National Alliance of Women's Organizations, National Board of Catholic Women of England and Wales, National Council of Women in Great Britain, Northern Ireland Women's European Platform, Practical Action, Soroptimist International Great Britain and Ireland (SIGBI) Limited, Tearfund, The Law Society, United Kingdom Association for the United Nations Development Fund for Women, Wales Assembly of Women, Widows Rights International, Widows for Peace through Democracy, Womankind Worldwide and World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

18-20162 (E) 051218

Please recycle

Statement

The United Kingdom Commission on the Status of Women Alliance, brings together a wide range of organisations working for women and girls. This statement is a synthesis of concerns.

Social protection, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure are all critical and inextricably linked elements of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. The achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals requires effective implementation of all three elements. This relies on strong global commitment to empowering women and girls throughout their entire life course. It is essential that all the Sustainable Development Goals, with their gendered aspects, are implemented in a way that recognises the multiple roles women play and their diversity.

Political will, together with robust resources, are required to create mechanisms that effectively protect the rights of women and girls and promote women's empowerment throughout their entire lives. Despite contributing significantly to their families and economies, too many women are limited in their life options and opportunities, and strategic action is vital to create the conditions in which they can develop their full potential. Protecting and promoting women also contributes to the sustainable development of societies as a whole. Partnership with the business sector can contribute to raising awareness and support advocacy for gender equality.

The United Nations High Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment has recognised the need to extend social protection and invest in care infrastructure in order to 'guarantee both caregivers' and care receivers' rights, agency, autonomy and wellbeing. For these efforts to succeed, they must take the rights, preferences and needs of all women into account.

Social Protection

Women of all ages must be able to make choices about their own lives without having to rely on family for basic needs. In many countries, social protection is enshrined in law; however, issues around implementation and resourcing of policies affect women's effective enjoyment of social protection and reduces their opportunities to take up paid work, particularly women with disabilities.

Many vulnerable women, including women in the sex trade, face particular barriers in accessing social protection. It is essential that social protection and pension systems take account of the realities of women's lives. At present, older women across the globe are much less likely than older men to have full pension entitlements, which perpetuates, and widens, gender inequalities in older age. Provision for older women in low- and middle-income countries is particularly limited, and compounded by limitations of land ownership and inheritance rights. Detaching pension entitlements from labour markets ensures that accumulated inequalities are not transferred into the pension system. Social pensions can also address gender and age specific risks, such as a widow's loss of assets, or child care responsibilities, particularly in skipped generation households. Pensions can be an effective way of recognising the value of women's non-remunerated work.

Social protection systems are vital to ensure women can live their lives free from fear for their safety and clear on their rights as citizens. Gender based violence places significant limitations on women worldwide, in particular for groups with vulnerabilities including women with disabilities. Strong social and judicial systems are required to provide an environment where women not only feel safe to report abuse, but can challenge social norms and engage fully in society. Ratifying the

Istanbul Convention is a key action in this regard, while strengthening the role of national human rights institutions can contribute to effective monitoring of implementation.

Social protection of women must be a key priority across policy areas, with a focus on mainstreaming a gender transformative, life course perspective to policy making. This should include gender budgeting, strengthening gender competence within government and implementing human rights treaties. Focus should be on treating women equally with men in economic protection and welfare schemes, adequate pension provision for all women and tackling gender stereotypes perpetuating women's low paid and precarious work.

Safeguarding women and girls socially should focus on implementing legal protections against discrimination and harassment of all kinds, providing access to justice for violence survivors and challenging causes of gendered violence. Specific action is essential to support women in the sex trade, who face multiple barriers, and to protect core freedoms and rights of all women, including widows, migrants, refugees and victims of trafficking, and developing timely, transparent processes for ensuring nationality rights, safe asylum, residency and citizenship.

Access to Public Services

Access to public services is linked to social protection, as public services are intended to be universal and accessible to all. In particular women on lower incomes typically rely on them to meet their basic needs, while women, including older women, also shoulder a disproportionate amount of unpaid care work, particularly where care systems are not comprehensive. The reduced funding and provision of public services resulting from austerity and policy changes constitutes a specific threat to gender equality as well as women's wellbeing. Women in rural areas and women with disabilities are particularly disadvantaged due to compounding factors such as lack of transport and digital infrastructure.

While sufficient investment in public services remains essential, action across a number of policy areas can help ensure women and girls access core services. Investment in digital infrastructure is critical to improve access to digital services, and contribute to widening access to learning and knowledge, as emphasised in Sustainable Development Goal 4. This has particular potential for women in rural areas, as radio and mobile technology is now often available even in very low income and remote areas. Investment in education and training is, however, essential alongside roll out of digital services, to ensure that women of all ages and backgrounds can benefit equitably. There must be a specific focus on appropriate training for older women, women with low literacy, newcomer and refugee women, and women with disabilities.

We ask, however, that access to public services for women and girls is safeguarded and promoted by investment in critical services and health and social care, education and child care. Co-production and gender impact analysis in service development, linked with rural proofing, is essential to ensure adequate provision. Gender, marital-status and socio-economically disaggregated statistics are vital.

Infrastructure for Gender Equality

Infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls is at the heart of Goal 4 and Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals, and is essential to ensure continued, effective engagement of women, and visibility for gender equality in policy making. Effective infrastructure is often missing or has been reduced in scope in recent years. The effectiveness of mechanisms to engage women and promote gender equality also critically depend on the human rights frameworks

and governance systems within which they operate. In the United Kingdom, for example, legislation passed in 2016 restricts organisations receiving public funding in how they engage with policy and advocacy work, which has further exacerbated difficulties to keep the issues visible since a national mechanism for engaging women was abolished in 2010.

We ask that infrastructure is strengthened through mainstreaming a gender perspective in policy making, as outlined above. In addition, we ask that steps are taken to strengthen mechanisms for engaging women in policy making through enabling effective engagement of women of all ages and backgrounds. Critically, this must include resourcing for women's collective voices to be both heard and heeded by a mechanism independent of government, including funding for co-production and capacity building particularly among rarely heard groups, including women in the sex trade. Women must also have a strong presence in leading positions in all sectors including parliament. Ensuring a holistic approach to social protection programme design, which has gender-sensitive education and training at its core, is essential.

Conclusion

Urgent action across the range of this priority theme is required to protect and promote women's empowerment in the context of significant change and challenge to human rights and equality frameworks across the globe. We ask all stakeholders to use this opportunity to the full.